

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
DIVISION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Early in the year 1957, oral inquiries came to members of the staff of the Division concerning a proposed Levittown, New Jersey which it was stated would be built in Burlington County, New Jersey. These inquiries asked what the Division's attitude was going to be if it appeared that the proposed Levittown would follow the patterns which it was said had existed in both Long Island and Pennsylvania Levittowns whereby Negroes would be refused opportunity to purchase homes.

As a result of these inquiries, the Director of the Division wrote on March 14, 1957 the following letter to Mr. William J. Levitt:

"From time to time, reference has been made to your Levittown project in Burlington County. Frequently, statements are made to the effect that non-whites will not be permitted to purchase homes in this development. I should like to know if these statements are true. I would be glad to confer with you if you so desire, at any place convenient to you.

"This Division has an interest in eliminating discrimination on account of race, creed, color or national origin, wherever it may exist in our State. We have legal authority, however, only in discrimination in employment, in places of public accommodation and in public housing. Wherever possible, we work with other state agencies on problems of discrimination, even in areas where we do not have legal jurisdiction.

"I hope you can find the time to see me."

A reply signed by Mr. Levitt was received on March 18, 1957 in which he said:

"I have your letter of March 14th but since we do not contemplate activity commencing at the New Jersey project for some time, I think that a meeting now would serve no useful purpose."

The newspapers continued to discuss Levittown, New Jersey as an on-going project in the months succeeding March 1957, and inquiries concerning this proposed development continued to come to the Division. It is a matter of record that in June 1957, the Division was given jurisdiction over housing built with public assistance. Consequently, on January 30, 1958, the Director of the Division wrote the following letter to Mr. Michael Albert of the Federal Housing Authority in Camden:

"It is my understanding that a New Jersey Levittown will very shortly be constructed in Willingboro Township in Burlington County. I should like to know if FMA has made any commitments for this project. If so, will you inform me. If not, would it be possible for you to inform me when such commitments are made.

"I do appreciate the splendid way in which you have cooperated with this agency in helping us so readily to administer this new legislation."

Mr. Albert replied on February 4, 1958 and stated:

"This will confirm our previous conversation with members of your staff, as well as your letter of January 30, 1958.

"We have not as yet issued any commitments in connection with the Levittown development in Willingboro Township. It might be well if you check with us periodically concerning the status of the development.

"Please be assured of our continued cooperation."

On March 31, 1958, the Director of the Division wrote again to Mr. William Levitt as follows:

"On March 14, 1957, I wrote to you requesting that you grant me a conference. I pointed out that this Division has an interest in eliminating discrimination on account of race, creed, color, or national origin wherever it may exist in our State. Since that letter was written, this Division has been granted legal jurisdiction in cases of discrimination wherever any type of government aid is used by the builder. The laws of our State also cover discrimination by lending agencies. A copy of our brochure describing our services to home purchasers is enclosed.

"In a letter dated March 18, 1957, you stated that to meet with me would serve no useful purpose, since you did not contemplate beginning activity at your New Jersey project for some time. I understand now that you have begun operations in Willingboro Township. I should like therefore to renew my request that you grant me a conference."

No reply was ever received to this letter.

On March 31, 1958, the Director of the Division assigned a field representative to investigate the status of the Levittown project in Burlington County and to learn and to seek to learn particularly if there was any public assistance. ✓

The investigator found no specific types of public assistance. In the course of his investigation, however, he was able to contact the Vice President and General Counsel of Levittown. His discussion with Mr. Goldman indicated that no policy on admission of Negroes had as yet ?

been declared. Through Mr. Goldman, a conference was arranged to convene on June 6, 1958.

This conference was held with the following in attendance: William J. Levitt, Ira G. Goldman representing Levitt and Sons, Inc.; and Carl W. Glatt, Isham B. Jones, Harold A. Lett and John P. Milligan, representing the Division Against Discrimination.

As this conference convened, there was before the group an issue of the New York Times of June 6, 1958 which quoted Mr. Levitt's answer to a question concerning racial segregation as follows:

"Our policy on that is unchanged. The two other Levittowns are white communities".

The conference proceeded. The Levitt interest explaining to the Division representatives that he had been advised by counsel that the Anti-Discrimination Law legislation in the field of housing did not apply to his operation. It was clear that the policy of the Levitt corporation would be as stated in the New York Times of that same date.

The Levitt Corporation had its opening sales day on June 7, 1958.

On June 16, 1958, the Division was informed that on this date a resolution presented by Assemblymen Williams, Franklin and Kesselhaut was introduced and passed in the Assembly as follows:

"WHEREAS, Mr. William J. Levitt, Developer of Levittown, Pa., is presently engaged in a construction of Levittown #3, situated in Burlington County, N.J.; and

"WHEREAS, the great State of New Jersey and its citizens were initial champions of the protection of civil rights in the Nation

"NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved, that Mr. Levitt and his organization be impressed with the mandate from the citizens of the State of New Jersey that discrimination will not be tolerated within the borders of this State."

On June 23, 1958, the Director of the Division learned through a telephone conversation with Michael Albert of the Camden ERA that 273 conditional commitments had been approved for Levittown.

Complaints were filed on June 8 and June 9, 1958 by two separate complainants against Levitt and Sons, Inc., however, since there was a question of whether the Division had jurisdiction until the commitments had been approved, the complainants were advised to return again. This they did and subsequently filed complaints which are dated after the day the commitments were validated.